

# Exhibit 1

WHITE HOUSE

# The Strzok-Page Texts and the Origins of the Trump-Russia Investigation

By ANDREW C. MCCARTHY | May 14, 2018 5:10 PM



The J. Edgar Hoover Federal Bureau of Investigation Building in Washington, D.C. (Aaron P. Bernstein/Reuters)

Peter Strzok and Lisa Page's texts shine a highly redacted light on how the Trump-Russia investigation began

begin.

It was July 31, 2016. Just days earlier, the Obama administration had quietly opened an FBI counterintelligence investigation of Russian cyber-espionage — hacking attacks — to disrupt the 2016 election. And not random, general disruption; the operating theory was that the Russians were targeting the Democratic party, for the purpose of helping Donald Trump win the presidency.

FBI special agent Peter Strzok was downright giddy that day.

The Bureau had finally put to bed “Mid Year Exam.” MYE was code for the dreaded investigation of Hillary Clinton’s improper use of a private email system to conduct State Department business, which resulted in the retention and transmission of thousands of classified emails, as well as the destruction of tens of thousands of government business records. Strzok and other FBI vets dreaded the case because it was a go-through-the-motions exercise: Everyone working on it knew that no one was going to be charged with a crime; that

was going to be charged with a crime, that Mrs. Clinton was going to be the next president of the United States; and that the

FBI's goal was not to be tarnished in the process of "investigating" her — to demonstrate, without calling attention to the suffocating constraints imposed by the Obama Justice Department, that the Bureau had done a thorough job, and that there was a legal rationale for letting Clinton off the hook that might pass the laugh test.

Peter Strzok

5/14/18

That mission was accomplished, Strzok and his colleagues believed, with Director James

Comey's press conference on July 5, outlining the evidence and recommending against charges that "no reasonable prosecutor" would bring. Now, having run the just-for-show interview of Hillary Clinton on July 2 — long after Comey's press statement that there would be no charges was in the can — Strzok was on the verge of a big promotion: to deputy assistant director of counterintelligence.

Even better: Now, he was working a *real* case — the Trump-Russia case. He was about to fly to London to meet with intelligence contacts and conduct secret interviews.

Not so secret, though, that he could contain himself.

As was his wont several times a day, Strzok texted his paramour, Lisa Page, the FBI lawyer in the lofty position of counsel to Deputy Director Andrew McCabe — which made Page one of the relative handful of Bureau officials who were in on the new probe. Late Sunday night, as he readied for his morning flight, Strzok wrote to Page, comparing the investigations of Clinton and

Trump.

And damn this feels momentous.  
Because this matters. The other  
one did, too, but that was to  
ensure that we didn't F  
something up. This matters  
because this MATTERS.

*This MATTERS.*

### **The Strzok-Page Texts: An Invaluable Narrative**

As my weekend column detailed, the House Intelligence Committee is spearheading a congressional effort to pry disclosure from the Justice Department regarding how and why the so-called Russia investigation was opened. With Justice and anonymous intelligence-community leakers having provided conflicting explanations, the latest controversy involves the role played by a CIA and FBI informant, based in Britain, who appears to have been deployed against marginal Trump-campaign figures (such as George Papadopoulos). Several bloggers began reporting the likely identity of this source over the weekend; I am going to follow the lead of the *Wall Street Journal's* Kim Strassel and resist mentioning the name — I am not in the news-breaker business. and it is likely to be confirmed

soon enough.

I want to make a different point.

House Intelligence Committee chairman Devin Nunes is pressing for limited disclosure of information from the government's closely held files. He is right to do so. No government operations can be completely beyond the examination of the people's representatives in our constitutional republic. Here, the Obama administration took extraordinary measures to withhold information from Congress about its Trump-Russia probe — such as not briefing the bipartisan leaders of the both chambers and their intelligence committees, the “Gang of Eight.” (See transcript of Director Comey's Testimony, March 20, 2017, questioning by Representative Elise Stefanik (R., N.Y.), House Intelligence Committee.) Besides, having litigated classified-information issues under procedures prescribed by federal law, I am confident that there are ways to get essential information disclosed without compromising intelligence methods and sources.

But all that aside, it may not be necessary to pry into informant files in order to find

answers to the most pressing questions.  
Those answers may be found in the

thousands of Strzok-Page texts. These  
provide a day-to-day narrative of the goings-  
on in the Clinton-emails and Trump-Russia  
investigations by two of the highest, most  
plugged-in officials in the government.

This fact has eluded us for months, ever  
since the existence of the texts was first  
made known. Yes, a few explosive messages  
have captured our attention, most notably,  
Strzok's "insurance policy" assertion: An  
account of an August 15 discussion among  
top FBI officials in then-deputy director  
Andrew McCabe's office, with Strzok  
observing that although it was highly  
unlikely "Trump gets elected," the  
government "can't take that risk" and  
needed an "insurance policy" against a  
Trump presidency. But for the most part, the  
texts have been dismissed as the ravings of  
star-crossed lovers whose loathing of Trump  
and disdain for Trump supporters should  
not be thought to reflect on the Bureau's  
legions of hard-working non-partisans.

That's the wrong way to look at it.



Strzok and Page are singularly well-informed, central players in the Clinton and Trump investigations. They tell us exactly what is going on and why — or at least they would if the Justice Department had not blacked out key parts of their running conversation.

Thanks mostly to the dogged work of Senator Ron Johnson (R., Wis.), who chairs the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, hundreds of pages of the Strzok-Page texts have been released publicly — trust me on that: I am bleary-eyed from a weekend of reading about half of them. Even in their heavily redacted form, they are a goldmine of insight.

But why are they so heavily redacted? The Justice Department and FBI have blocked out passages — sometimes, several exchanges at a time — that would provide context for the key decisions and actions taken by government officials. And while the names of high-ranking FBI officials who figure constantly in the texts have, for the most part, been revealed, the names of Justice Department, White House, intelligence, and other government officials

have been withheld.

### **Late July 2016**

Let me give you a small window into what we're dealing with, homing in on what Nunes has been inquiring about, the start of the Trump-Russia counterintelligence investigation. (Senator Johnson has posted the texts [here](#). The massive document, covering a couple of years, takes a few seconds to load. I will be addressing the texts beginning on what is paginated DOJ-PROD-0000199; we'll cover just the eight days from July 28 through August 5, 2016.)

We now know that the investigation began in late July 2016, apparently driven by this concatenation: the hacking of Democratic email accounts; the first reports from the Clinton campaign-sponsored opposition-research compilation that became known as the Steele dossier; and information that a low-level Trump campaign adviser, Papadopoulos, had heard the Russians had thousands of Hillary Clinton's emails. The Strzok-Page texts of this period are eye-opening, combining alarm over the Putin regime's suspected hand in the hacking and scrutiny of media stories about Trump ties to Russia.

In the wee hours of Thursday morning, July 28, while they separately watched the Democratic National Convention — cooing over Vice President Joe Biden (“he’s just a really sincere guy”) and grouching over “stupid \*ss Bernie supporters” — Strzok and Page perused a Josh Marshall *Talking Points Memo* post entitled, “Trump & Putin. Yes, It’s really a Thing.”

It’s an interesting article. Marshall observed that Donald Trump was deeply dependent on Russian financing. In just the last year, his debt load had increased by \$280 million (to a staggering \$630 million); he’d had trouble finding financing because of prior bankruptcies; and thus he’d relied heavily on Russian capital to rebuild his business. “Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets,” Trump’s son Donald Jr. had told a real-estate conference in 2008.

Marshall pointed out that shady Russian oligarchs were involved in Trump development ventures; that Trump’s tax returns might reveal the depth of financial ties to Moscow, but Trump had refused to disclose them; that Trump had chosen to

bring into his campaign Paul Manafort, who had had worked for years for a Kremlin-backed Ukrainian party, and Carter Page, a Putin apologist with financial ties to Gazprom, the Kremlin-controlled energy behemoth; that Putin had “aligned all Russian state controlled media behind Trump”; and that the Trump campaign, though otherwise indifferent to the party platform during the Republican convention, had intervened to water down a provision on providing assistance to Ukraine against Russian aggression. (That last claim has been persuasively rebutted, by Byron York, among others.)

Just as Page urges this column on Strzok, there is a redacted passage. Minutes later, after Strzok has read it, there is another redacted message. Then, Strzok says, “This article highlights the thing I mentioned to you earlier, asking if Bill had noted it to the 7th floor. I’m going to send it to him.”

“Bill” is Bill Priestap, at the time the assistant director of the Counterintelligence Division, one of the Bureau’s highest-ranking officials. It was Priestap’s division, in which Strzok was about to become his deputy, that would run the newly opened

Trump-Russia case file. Minutes later, over a period of 50 minutes, Strzok and Page exchange 13 texts, some of them apparently lengthy. All of them have been blacked out by the Justice Department.

Later that day, while they're in the office at around 5 P.M., Strzok texts Page: "Hey if you discussed the new case with Andy would appreciate any input/guidance before we talk to Bill at 3." "Andy," of course, is Andrew McCabe, then the FBI's No. 2 official. Strzok wanted to know what McCabe was thinking before making a plan with Priestap.

After 8 P.M., Strzok tells Page about what appears to be Justice Department officials who will be involved in the Trump-Russia investigation. Again, though, the Justice Department has redacted most of these names — other than an apparent reference to Trisha Anderson, then of the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel. (Ms. Anderson is married to Charles Newman, then a lawyer in the Obama White House for the National Security Council). Strzok texts, "Trisha mentioned to [REDACTED] to put [REDACTED] on this new case for seniority until she comes back from al" ("al" is

“annual leave” — vacation time in government-speak).

### **Strzok’s Sudden Trip to London**

By that weekend, as a result of consultations within these government agencies, Strzok was headed to London. While preparing, he teased Page that he’s “partial to any woman sending articles about how nasty the Russians are” — the rest of his text is redacted. After Page’s heavily redacted reply about how the Russians “are probably the worst. Very little I finding redeeming about this. Even in history. Couple of good writers and artists I guess,” Strzok raged in a heavily redacted reply, “f\*\*\*ing conniving cheating savages. At statecraft, athletics, you name it. I’m glad I’m on Team USA.”

After yet more redacting, Strzok got back to the new case. He’d been “talking with [REDACTED], who’s been great. Going back through acting DCM. All good, and asked him to keep quiet, [there follows some odd coding — ‘bu+H3382t’] I think he will inform main State and they may call over to see what’s going on.” Clearly, Strzok was in communication with a counterpart at the Obama State Department — which, we now

know, was ultimately in communication with the Bureau about both the Steele dossier and reporting from Clinton confederates Sidney Blumenthal and Corey Shearer.

Page related that she would not be sent on the trip to Britain because McCabe trusts Strzok and the (unidentified) agent who was accompanying him. It is then that Strzok, as noted above, exclaimed how “momentous” this new investigation — the one that “MATTERS” — feels to him. Interestingly though, right before this exclamation, Strzok has something else to say, apparently about the launch of the Trump-Russia probe, but . . . the Justice Department has redacted it.

By Monday afternoon (Eastern Time — evening in the U.K.), Strzok had arrived in London. He texted Page to ask if McCabe had been able to speak with [REDACTED] yet; Page said McCabe had been not reach “him” yet, but would keep trying. Meantime, Page asserted, “Ho boy. Don’t tell Moffa, but andy is cancelling their brief. And he wants it first.”

Moffa is Jonathan Moffa, an intelligence agent who worked closely with Strzok and

Page on the Clinton-emails investigation.

Page's news prompted Strzok to answer, "I think that's smart. Bill may need a little

Page, the lawyer, then counseled Strzok to be careful of what he signs in England so that he can "lawfully protect" the information — meaning, *conceal it*.

saving from himself."

Plainly, the FBI's deputy director wanted to receive the first briefing on Strzok's meetings in Britain, even though the normal chain of command called for Priestap to be briefed first by his direct subordinates.

By noon (Eastern Time) on Tuesday, August 2, Strzok had had his first meeting. Page asked whether it went well, but the Justice Department has deleted Strzok's

response — all we get is his next text, "With the [REDACTED], yes, good meeting." Most of Page's response is deleted, except for "Whoa."

Page, the lawyer, then counseled Strzok to



be careful of what he signs in England so that he can “lawfully protect” the information — meaning, *conceal it*. As she put it, “Just thinking about Congress, foia [the Freedom of Information Act], etc.” Strzok replied that he had just sent a document to Page by FBI net email; she instructed him to forward it to two people: “[REDACTED] and Trisha too” (another apparent reference to the Justice Department’s Trisha Anderson). Page elaborated that Trisha “is acting Jim” — which seems to mean she was acting temporarily in the stead of James Baker, then the Bureau’s general counsel.

About two hours later, Strzok was pleading with Page to get into the office to prevent “ogc” (the Bureau’s Office of General Counsel) from making “not legally necessary” changes to the document — he was worried that delay to deal with nitpicking edits “will derail this thing” that he was in Britain to do. Page replied that she was already in the office.

While she was reviewing the document, Strzok decided to tell her some background: “Interesting fact. Guy we’re about to interview was —” But we learn nothing more

about who Strzok was about to interview because the Justice Department has redacted it.

Page proceeds to relate that she had been questioned sharply by an official whose identity is redacted, in the nature of “what are you doing on this case” that is such a closely held secret. But she elaborates that David Laufman, a Justice Department counterintelligence lawyer (who was very involved in the Clinton-emails probe) leapt to her defense.

By the early morning hours (Eastern Time) of August 3, Strzok prepared to head home, having conducted multiple interviews the previous afternoon. As he thanked Page and, derivatively, McCabe, for waiting until he returned to hold a formal meeting with the Justice Department regarding the new case, Page observed, “Jesus. There’s a lot to read here. Let me call [REDACTED] check in with andy, and I will call you.” Later, as it came time to leave for the airport, Strzok agreed emphatically with Page’s stress on “New case. Information flow. Control.” We learn, despite more redactions, that Strzok planned to tell Priestap anything he wanted to know, but would “reinforce” the need to control the information flow when he

briefed Page, Priestap and McCabe.”

### **‘The White House Is Running This’**

Strzok was back in Washington by 7 P.M., in a cab headed to FBI headquarters. His texts with Page, then and the next afternoon, discussed the various other high-ranking officials who had to be briefed — including Bill Rybicki, chief of staff to Director Comey, and George Toscas, the deputy attorney general in charge of the Justice Department’s National Security Division.

On the afternoon of August 5, Strzok and Page engaged in a tense conversation which involved an imminent meeting with “agency people — an apparent reference to the CIA. Strzok suggested that, for the new case, they should conduct Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning meetings “with [REDACTED]” just “like we did with mye” — Mid Year Exam, the Clinton probe.

Finally, after some back-and-forth over who should be invited to a major meeting about the new case, a meeting was held. In the aftermath, at about 4:30 P.M., Strzok and Page had the following exchange:

STRZOK: And hi. Went well, best we could have expected. Other than

could have expected. Other than [REDACTED] quote: “the White House is running this.” My answer, “well, maybe for you they are.” And of course, I was planning on telling this guy, thanks for coming, we’ve got an hour, but with Bill [Rybicki, Director Comey’s chief of staff] there, I’ve got no control....

PAGE: Yeah, whatever (re the WH comment). We’ve got the emails that say otherwise.

It would be interesting to know what is in the emails that apparently clarify how the Obama administration divided responsibility for running the Trump-Russia investigation. Just like it would be interesting to know what is behind all the many redactions in these texts about how and why the Trump-Russia investigation got started.

On what basis has the Justice Department concealed passages and references to government officials from these significant conversations? Are Justice and the Bureau claiming that the redactions are necessary because the information is classified — even though we’re talking about communications

between highly trained intelligence officials?

And if that is the claim, are they telling us

that Hillary Clinton was  
investigated — and given a pass —  
for the unauthorized  
transmission of classified  
information by FBI officials who were  
themselves actively engaged in the  
unauthorized transmission of classified  
information?

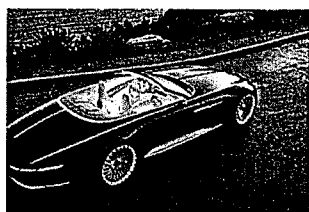
The Strzok-Page texts rate a lot more  
attention, and a lot more transparency.



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